

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 000148

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2014

TAGS: [KHIV](#) [TBIO](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [MI](#) [HIV](#) [AIDS](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GETS PERSONAL ABOUT AIDS AT LAUNCH OF NATIONAL POLICY

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Peter W. Lord, reasons 1.5 (b/d).

1. (SBU) At the February 10 launch of the National AIDS Policy, President Muluzi made the surprise announcement that one of his brothers had died three years ago as a result of AIDS. In the address attended by UNAIDS Executive Director Dr. Peter Piot, Muluzi also declared he knows his HIV status is negative because he has gone for voluntary testing. While acknowledging that the prevalence rate has stabilized between 14 and 15 percent, Muluzi encouraged Malawians to go for voluntary counseling and testing (VCT). With only 3 percent of the population having visited a testing center, Muluzi advocated VCT as the way to go "if the fight against the epidemic is to be successful."

2. (U) Supported by USAID-funded POLICY project, the National AIDS Policy that was launched by Muluzi in Blantyre on February 10 aims to provide comprehensive guidance on prevention, treatment, care, support, and the multi-sectoral response to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The policy has a particular focus on human rights and empowerment as the primary means for fighting the pandemic at the village level. As a result, protection against marital rape and provisions for gender equity in the family, equal access to treatment and information, protection of prisoners against violence and abuse, and equal treatment of the disabled are all included. The policy also contains several controversial provisions, such as allowing children age 13 and older to seek VCT without parental consent, authorizing health-providers to disclose the status of an infected individual to a spouse, and approving the provision of condoms in prisons. The Cabinet officially adopted the policy in November 2003.

COMMENT

-----  
3. (C) While the President's announcement about AIDS in his family was laudable, it has been too long in coming. In a country so clearly affected by HIV/AIDS, Muluzi has had (and missed) many opportunities to deal with the pandemic in a personal and practical way. The GOM has had countless high-level officials and parliamentarians whose deaths have gone unremarked, even as the daily business of government has been compromised by AIDS-related absences and deaths. While Muluzi has routinely included HIV/AIDS messages in almost all of his speeches for several years, this marks the first occasion that he has personalized the issue.

4. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The need for Muluzi (and other senior officials) to move directly and personally to address HIV/AIDS was made all too apparent at the February 10 launch. When Muluzi announced he had voluntarily been tested for HIV, both the Ministers of Health and Commerce (who were seated behind the Ambassador) audibly giggled. END COMMENT.  
BROWNING